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AUTHOR	Seng, Seok Hoon
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the impact of three early childhood education research programs in Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia, and funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The Mount Druitt Project in Australia has implemented institution- and home-based educational programs, which also monitor children's physical development and work closely with parents. One of the most important outcomes has been the spread of preschools into the Government system, especially in disadvantaged areas. There has been little short-term effect on school performance; lasting effects are more closely related to social and attitudinal development than to cognitive variables. The Singapore Project is a 9-year longitudinal study investigating cognitive and social development in preschoolers in three 3-year phases: (1) collecting baseline data on the normative development of 3,000 preschoolers; (2) providing center-based intervention focusing on English language skills; and (3) developing a closer home-school-society relationship. This project provided the first comprehensive data on social and cognitive development of Singapore children, provided intensive training programs for practitioners in approximately 40 preschools, and developed effective parent and community involvement strategies. The Malaysian study investigated the development of over 3,000 preschoolers from various sections of Malaysian society. Findings indicated that urban advantaged children were more advanced in physical, cognitive, language, and socio-emotional development than were children from other groups. Estate children were the least advanced and rural children and urban disadvantaged did not differ from each other. Changes in child-rearing practices and preschool education were recommended to alleviate some of the differences among the groups. (KDFB)

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PROMOTING AND INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Seng Seok Hoon
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University
Singapore

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Abstract

Promoting and Investing in Early Childhood Development Projects

The field of early childhood education has been the focus of increased research and public concern in recent years. The Bernard vanLeer Foundation, a private institution based in the Netherlands has for the past 28 years concentrated its resources on support for early childhood development throughout the world. Their main emphasis is the promotion of activities that enhance the well being of young children , their families and the communities that surround them.

From its earliest days, the creation of links between researchers and practictioners throughout the world has been promoted by the Foundation. Opportunities for an interchange of ideas and information have always been recognised as integral to the process of influencing worldwide thinking and practice on the problems of the disadvantaged and developing young child. The Foundation encourages the international projects which it supports, to assess and monitor their research regionally.

This paper singles out three early childhood research projects (funded by the Foundation in the eighties) from Australia, Singapore and Malaysia for comparison and evaluation. It aims to take stock of the accumulated experience from research studies involving large samples that span over diverse communities and cultures and to consider the challenges that still lie ahead.

Whatever the local features of these three research studies, the center of their attention, though expressed in different forms, has been a set of fundamental partnerships between the parent and child, between researchers and practictioners and between communities and professionals.In this paper the development of these meaningful partnerships will be highlighted and other important alternative approaches recommended. Implications of such partnerships and approaches for cross cultural research collaboration will also be examined.

Seng Seok Hoon
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University
Singapore

September 1996

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Seng Seok Hoon
National Institute of Education
Nanyang Technological University
Singapore

As we approach the twenty-first century we are witnessing important changes occuring around us especially in the field of early childhood education and development. There is now a much more supportive climate for increased interest and investment in programmes favouring early childhood care and development. Dramatic political, economic and social changes across the world seem to allow people to think and hope about social problems and solutions in new ways. We are entering a new decade which is stimulating us to reflect and creatively think about the shape of things to come, including visions of childhood in the coming century.

In 1979 when the International Year of the Child was declared, an opportunity was provided for new child-care and development thinking and initiatives. Without doubt, the year generated a new enthusiasm and interest in the child. Many projects were undertaken at the national level to identify the needs and to create awareness around the idea of the "whole child". In addition a host of parental programmes were started and at the same time there was an emphasis on formal preschools.

There has been good and significant progress made in projects connected with the improvement of child survival and more modest advances with respect to child care and development. Various organisations formed at the time of the International Year of the Child continued to be productive and active . However it is difficult to trace the effects of the work of these organisations because there has been no systemmatic mechanism to trace most of these international efforts.

Fortunately, there are several worldwide programmes from agencies and governments which have been participating and partnering together for years in their effort to enhance the growth and development of children to help them realize their individual and social potential . One such organisation is the Bernard van Leer Foundation. This paper summarises the objectives of this Foundation and describes and evaluates three early childhood projects supported by them.

Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private institution based in the Netherlands. Originally created for broad humanitarian purposes, it now concentrates its resources on support for early childhood development. The Foundation takes its name from Bernard vanLeer, a Dutch industrialist who died in 1958 and gave the entire share capital of his worldwide enterprise for humanitarian purposes. The Foundation's income is derived from this enterprise - Royal Packaging Industries VanLeer which is established in over 30 countries and whose core business is the manufacture of packaging products.

The Foundation's Objectives

The central objective of the Bernard vanLeer Foundation is to improve opportunities for young children who live in disadvantaged circumstances. The Foundation uses two main strategies to accomplish this objective:

*it supports the development of innovative field-based approaches in the area of early childhood development; and

*it shares relevant experiences with as wide an audience as possible in order to influence policy and practice.

This means that the Foundation supports projects in the field and also advocates for policies and practices that will create improved conditions for children. With experiences gained from supporting hundreds of projects around the world, the Foundation's philosophy and activities are embedded in the realities of life. It believes that in order to improve opportunities for young children it is necessary to work with the people who surround them and who can have an influence on their lives. This includes parents, siblings, other family members, communities, organisations that provide sevices, local and national governments and international institutions.

Project Partners and Focus

The Foundation does not run any field-based projects itself. Instead, it offers support to organisations in the different countries. These organisations include government departments, local municipalities, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations. These local partners are responsible for all aspects of a project development, management, training, implementation and evaluation. They also contribute a proportion of the costs in terms of both money and services.

The projects focus on those children from birth to eight years of age who are least able to benefit from educational and developmental opportunities because of social and other forms of disadvantage. These include the children of ethnic and cultural minorities, children living in urban slums, shanty towns and remote rural areas, and children of teenage parents.

A key objective in initiating and implementing projects is that their work will have lasting effects. This could mean that the project itself becomes self-sustaining, or that the lessons learned stimulate and inform other work. In some cases projects might start out as experiments. If all goes well, then experiences gained can be shared. This does not mean setting up more projects to do the same thing, but contributing to reflection, planning, practice and evaluation regionally, nationally and internationally. Some projects cover a small geographical area, others are province or state-wide while yet others are national in focus.

How the Projects work

All research projects supported by the Foundation have, at their core, the development of young children. Some projects are centre-based which means that they are working in and through pre-schools, nurseries or primary schools. Other projects are home-based and work with families in their own homes and other care givers in the community in order to create understanding and awareness of children's developmental needs. Many projects combine both these approaches and much of the work is carried out by women from the same community who have been trained by the project.

Work with parents and community members might include the importance of play, making toys and equipment from scrap materials and from the natural environment, information and advice on nutrition and health, and other needs of the children. The involvement of parents and other adults help to build up their skills and self-confidence. This, in turn, can lead to other improvements in the self-assurance of the community as a whole.

Projects supported by the Foundation base their work on a number of common principles.

* A holistic approach to children's development: this means looking at all aspects of a child's life.

* Emphasising the special role that parents have as the child's first educators: this means that parents do not only learn about what it means to be a parent, they learn that they matter, and they learn that they can change their lives and those of their children.

* Improving the children's environments: this means a community-based approach, working with the adults who care for the children to enable them all to achieve a better life. It builds on the principle that educating children means educating adults.

* Embedding projects firmly in local communities: because in this way people are motivated to tackle their own problems and show that they can produce effective solutions. Solutions that are rooted in the local community, make use of local resources, come under their own control, are affordable, and can be sustained.

According to Hugh Philp in his penetrative book "Barbs in the Arrow" which explores the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation from 1965 to 1986, the mission of the Foundation in the eighties was to realise the human potential among the depressed, disadvantaged and deprived groups. Within this broad mission, there was a number of specific pointers to guide the policy of the Foundation. The concentration was upon the developing human being and the field of action was education in its broadest sense. Based on the years of experimental practice and research findings of the twenty or so years before then (1960-1980) it was found that the early years of childhood up to seven and the period of adolescence seem the most likely to yield the best results.

Restrictions of finance made it necessary for the Foundation to concentrate its efforts on the period from birth to seven. Existing resources of expertise and manpower also dictated greater concentration and deepening of focus. With the pre-school child and his or her needs as a focus and his or her optimal development as the aim, action dealt with a series of widening concentric circles: the caregiver, the family, the micro-community and the macro-community involving on the way many adults, adolescents, professionals from many disciplines. They formed a network surrounding the young child with a coherent educative atmosphere. In order to enhance the development of the child, it is essential to take into account and work with all the social forces which affect that development. The social background is a total background and operates on the child as such.

Substantial investment to date has been concentrated on the age group 0-7 years and this has given rise to an increasingly distinctive body of know-how and experience. The Foundation's perspective on early childhood education was more than merely cognitive in view. It involves the family and community members both in the delivery of services and in various support roles. It therefore requires specific forms of training for adults as para-professionals. Philp stresses two levels of benefits to the children involved and to the adults. Early childhood education thus became a vehicle for children's development and adult self-expression, acting in the end as a powerful force for community betterment.

Since the early eighties the Foundation research programme activity has extended far beyond purely school bound education to include for example projects focusing directly on the child, the family and the community. The research activity has been spreading across many countries, ranging across levels of development and suiting a number of "ideological complexions". It dealt with a subject area of "the disadvantaged" which is of great political and social sensitivity. Its entry into any given country cannot therefore be merely a technical act but in some measure a negotiated compromise between the Foundation's priorities and those of the nation concerned.

Early Childhood Education Projects

This section is concerned with a brief analysis of three projects with an early childhood education or early childhood care and education component as defined by the grants made to them by the Foundation in the eighties. Since it became actively involved in field projects, the Foundation has been supporting a small number of relatively large scale projects, the majority of them using early childhood education as a strategy for alleviating or preventing disadvantage.There was a movement towards greater involvement with government institutions and towards major projects involving parents and the community.

Mt.Druitt, AUSTRALIA

The Mt.Druitt project was in the beginning designated to be an example of a project to compensate the needs of the disadvantaged child. Situated in a new housing estate on the edge of a large industrial city, in an affluent society, the nature of the disadvantage was social and in a relative sense, economic. According to Philp the children were, for the most part reasonably well nourished, superficially well housed, well clothed and had excellent welfare services available to them from the state - at least in principle if not always in practice. There were good primary schools with reasonably well-educated , excellently trained teachers, a wide range of materials and equipment and a curriculum well up to international standards. Yet in Australia, particularly Sydney,these children were greatly disadvantaged.

The project sought ways and means to alleviate or remedy this. It was well and carefully planned in the light of the knowledge of the early 1970s and was conducted in the best of conditions. Well trained, well educated teachers, experienced in working with five to eight year olds were selected and given a year of special training, partly in a university and partly in Mt. Druitt. Five programmes were identified, four institution-based and the fifth in the homes of the children. The four programmes were:

* a cognitive programme based on the work of Weikart et al (1971)

* a behaviourist programme based on that of Bushell (1973)

* a competency programme derived from Almy (1975), Anderson and Messick (1974) and Butler et al (1975)

* a contemporary programme reflecting the philosophy and methods most commonly in use in Australia pre-schools and was essentially in the traditional early childhood mode of the United Kingdom.

* a home-based programme which was entirely eclectic, since a specific curriculum and methods had to be devised by the teachers for each individual child.

A well qualified programme assistant was assigned to each of the

five. The curriculum for each of the first four was developed in a specific school by the particular programme assistant, the project field director and the teachers in collaboration with the school staff as a whole, and in the case of the competency programme, in collaboration with parents. Schools were supplied with materials and equipment selected and/or developed by the programme assistants and the teachers. For the pre-school components, new buildings were constructed within the grounds of the existing primary schools and lengthy briefing sessions were held with principals, teachers and parents.

Contact was established with the health authorities who examined each child, conducted a diet survey and a nutritional survey and monitored general physical development. Lengthy interviews with parents established general demographic data, status, attitudes to school, methods of child rearing and so on. There was a deliberate attempt to discover the disadvantages,the deficiencies, the strengths and the weaknesses of the children and to design programmes directly and specifically related to these. The Mt. Druitt experiment was a sincere effort , in the best of conditions, to alleviate disadvantage by means of good quality compensatory early childhood education programmes.

It should be emphasised that there was no intention of comparing the efficacy of the four school based programmes with each other or any one of them with the home based. The intent was to discover how each programme worked best in what kind of circumstances, so that parents and teachers and administrators in the long run could decide which of them seemed best to meet their needs and those of the children. It was not (Philp reminded) a research project. It was a project in early childhood education, an effort to "compensate for disadvantage through education".

The programmes, except for the home based, were carried beyond the preschool (which caters for children aged three years and seven months to four years and seven months) into the first two years of compulsory schooling in the same schools. In each case the curricular, methods and strategies were designedin terms of the original theoretical models. It may reasonably be said that this was an attempt at careful follow through. Children's progress was measured and monitored and the entire programme evaluated according to the best psychometric principles. With the inevitable losses due to family movement or death, the great majority of the children were exposed to three years of planned intervention. The children in the home based group entered normal classes in schools in Mt. Druitt and no efforts were made to develop special programmes for them.

At that time, in the context of New South Wales, paraprofessionals (untrained aides) were introduced into the classrooms. This had not been attempted previously in the New South Wales government schools and it was perhaps one of the most interesting outcomes of the project that teachers came to work enthusiastically with such people. There was a sustained effort to involve parents actively in thge day to day work of the schools. This was both innovatory and in line with the compensation thesis.

At the end of the three year intervention period, the programme assistants were withdrawn from active development of curriculum and methods, but remained for a further year within the schools, in part to complete the evaluation process but also to work with the principals and teachers, if requested to do so, on further development.

Unfortunately, in retrospect, no formal effort was made to replicate the project with further samples in the preschools.However, during the first three years (phase one of the project) the close relationship between home and school had become so apparent to the project team that major efforts were made in the second phase to involve parents in an active, purposeful way in the activities of the institution.

One of the most important structural outcomes of the project is the spread of preschools into the Government system, especially in the disadvantaged areas. Several of the innovatory programmes and many of the methods were taken over and adapted often in an improved form by schools and teachers in other places. The home based programme spread very rapidly in a number of quite different ways in Mt.Druitt itself. It has taken on a form of home visitors who work directly with parents and children on issues related to and not only to school problems but to general programmes of parenting. It was a novel and successful initiative.

The research evidence from the project also suggest that in the short term, pre-school and follow through programmes had little effect on school performance . Variables such as health and specific intervention programmes do not in general contribute significantly. What really matters in terms of gains as well as in terms of specific performance are the socioeconomic variables. It rapidly became clear that the important lasting effects on the children were much more closely related to social and attitudinal development than to cognitive variables. Furthermore,in some sections of the study,according to Philp, it was found that child rearing practices within the homes had changed in the course of the project and afterwards, but these had probably more effect on younger siblings than on the children in the original group.

To sum up, it may be fairly said that the major outcome of the Mt.Druitt project for the Foundation was the demonstration that programmes entirely within school, however well designed and executed, cannot have the major effects hoped and planned for unless they are strongly supported by parallel programmes within the home and community.

It is also of significance that although the home-based programme for any one child lasted for only one year and the child was then fed into the kindergarten along with other children, nonetheless the effects of home-based were longer lasting than those of any other programmes. Programmes which linked home and school were more likely to have lasting effects on the children than those based solely within the school.

As reinforced by Philp many times, any effective early intervention programme must focus on a great deal more than academic instruction even if its goals are no more than attainment of competence in the basic skills fundamental to school success. If we are really serious about the prevention or amelioration of disadvantage then we must look to the child's entire background, physical and social and start working closely and cooperatively with the total communities into which children are born and in which they receive their early socialization.

Growing up in SINGAPORE

The Singapore project has been one of the few large scale research programmes supported by the Foundation. A nine year longitudinal study was begun in 1983 aimed at investigating the basic cognitive and social developmental processes of preschool children, ages three to six years. The research was carried out by the National Institute of Education, the one and only teacher training institution in the small republic island. The project also involved intervention strategies that attempted to enhance the children's competencies over the nine years of study.

The project was planned with the following specific aims:

* to measure Singaporean pre-school children's cognitive growth in terms of their ability to master basic language skills, to understand simple mathematical concepts, and to perform tasks that require them to distinguish, to compare, to reason and to perceive relations as interpreted through performance of Piagetian tasks.

* to study, through observation, children's social behaviour in the structured environment of their classrooms and

* to investigate and monitor selected aspects of the children's home and school environment as it affected their cognitive and social development.

The focus of the Singapore project is very much competency-oriented . This is in line with the pragmatic nature of the Singaporean educational system and its pre-occupation with developing human resources. Competency is here defined as a skill or set of skills which are developmental , heirarchical and necessary for survival and for the mental and social well being of children.

At the school level, it falls into two categories: prescribed competency and non-prescribed competency. Prescribed competencies cognitive, social and psychomotor are those areas stressed by the Ministry of Education. They are thought to provide an essential basis for the education of primary school children in Singapore. Non-prescribed competencies are not included in the primary curriculum in the first year of schooling. In schools, the teaching of prescribed competencies are done through subjects such as mathematics and languages while non-prescribed

competencies are not taught directly but are embedded in all types of learning activities.

There were three phases in the Singapore longitudinal project. The first phase (1983-1986) involved the collection of normative-descriptive data about children's cognition and social development. In this phase of the project, a total of 3000 children aged three to six years were tested. The aim was to find out about children's thinking, their language proficiency and their ability to relate to others. Altogether each child had to complete 26 tasks on a one-to-one basis.

The baseline data were analysed and fed into the second phase of the project(1987-1990) which involved centre-based intervention. From the data collected in the first phase and from the problems highlighted, it was clear that the English Language skills of children in non-private kindergartens needed looking into, and this was done through training teachers and centre-supervisors to adopt a more integrative approach in language teaching, using communicatively-based teaching methods. The two year training programme started in 1987 . Assessment was both formative and summative and there was a significant gain in the measure of success.

The focus of the third phase (1990-1993) was on the development of a partnership in the child's education, bringing together parents, trainers and pre-school personnel, representing a triadic relationship among home, school and society.

Altogether a total of 3091 children were tested so far, drawn from 40 pre-school centres, which were classified into five centre types on the basis of ownership or affiliation, namely MOE (Ministry of Education) PAP (People's Action Party) PA (People's Association) NTUC (National Trades Union Congress) and Private (affiliated to the YMCA, YWCA and some churches). Children from the centers, sampled on the factors of age and sex, were then assigned to cohorts grouped by age (at intervals of six months) and tested sequentially on three or four occasions. On each occasion, three different age groups of children were tested.

The dissemination of research findings to teachers, parents and trainers has been an important role of the research project team. For this reason, the project is very well documented and papers and reports have been presented at seminars and conferences. Being the most extensive research on pre-school children's development ever done in Singapore, this study not only provide useful information concerning the development of Singapore pre-schoolers, but also suggest ways and means through which children's development can be enhanced. The knowledge and experience gained are shared with many of the National Institute of Education's in-service and pre-service teachers and supervisors.

In summary over the period of nine years, the findings from the project had supported the universality claim of certain characteristics in children. Singapore pre-schoolers are not much different from children elsewhere with respect to their thoughts

and behaviour. The longitudinal study revealed that the young children were definitely aware of the importance of the English language. They expressed emerging bilingual behaviours in their readiness to learn and exhibit knowledge of the English alphabet, knowledge of words in English to add to a growing vocabulary, and the ability to hold a book in the appropriate position for reading in English, rather than in their mother tongue - Chinese, Malay or Tamil. The six year olds in the study indicated that they knew two languages. Some of them were found to be fluent speakers in English and in the second language, which researchers attributed to the conditions in the home environment.

Additionally, in the area of social development, children showed gains over the pre-school years in sharing and cooperative behaviours. The children's performance on social tasks showed that young children learn through imitation and direct instruction indicating that early childhood teachers have been successful in socializing their pupils. Although the sample in the study was composed of equal numbers of boys and girls, little attention or data was collected on gender differences. Parents in Singapore, especially among the Chinese ethnic group, place greater emphasis on the education of their sons. It was expected that gender difference in social and cognitive abilities may vary among the different cultural groups.

In 1992, a pilot study indicated that all boys and girls show developmental trends in their performance across all tasks replicated from the Phase One study. There is a high percentage of success in the bi-lingual ability of these preschoolers especially from the Chinese preschoolers in private kindergartens. The five to six year olds stood out as more competent in their language and social performance. However the girls did better than the boys in the language tasks and the boys are more successful in the mathematics tasks. In the social tasks, the boys tend to share and cooperate less than the girls especially the three to five year olds. Both boys and girls found the cognitive tasks most difficult. One possible explanation is the emphasis that preschools have given to the teaching of school subjects rather than to thinking or to the development of cognition in the curriculum.

The executive director of the Bernard van Leer Foundation Dr.Rein van Gendt in 1993 noted that the National Institute of Education's project in Singapore has been unique in that not only has it provided the first comprehensive data on the social and cognitive development of children in Singapore, but it has also led to intensive training programmes for teachers and supervisors from about 40 pre-schools. It has, furthermore, led to the development of relevant parent and community involvement strategies aimed at reinforcing the home environment in improving early childhood care and development in Singapore.

The Malaysian Child Development Project

Interest in child development in Malaysia had been mounting in the eighties due to the growing number of working mothers

especially among the professional class. This created an awareness for stimulating children's intellectual growth and parents were generally anxious to provide their children with a headstart in life in an attempt to ensure their academic success in primary and secondary schools.

Increase in the woman workforce in the lower income group also raised the demand for child minding services, nurseries, and kindergartens. Unlike those for the advantaged children, the qualities of these services were often under suspect according to Chiam (1991). To ensure minimum standard, the Children Welfare Act was passed in 1985 which required all child minders to be trained and registered.

In spite of the interest to stimulate children's intellectual development and the demand for nursery and kindergarten, few attempts had been made to investigate the devlopment of Malaysian children. No systematic study was carried out to research into the different areas of development and how they were related to each other. There was little information on the size and effects of the underdevelopment of the disadvantaged children.

In 1986 the Bernard van Leer Foundation undertook to finance a study into the physical and psychological development of preschool children from the urban advantaged, urban disadvantaged, rural and estate sectors of the Malaysian society. For two years , instruments were constructed and refined to measure the physical, social and emotional development of preschool children.

The study was carried out in three districts in Selangor Darul Ehsan, a state on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia and the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. The rural areas drew their economic resources from the fishing, rubber estate and oil palm plantations. About 3099 three to six year old children were selected from these areas and grouped under the urban advantaged, the urban disadvantaged, rural and estate sectors. The main aim was to investigate the influence of the environment on preschool children's development as well as as to ascertain the ceiling and basal line of their development.

It was found that urban advantaged children were more advanced in physical, cognitive, language and socio-emotional development than children in the other three disadvantaged groups. Generally, estate children were the least advanced in all these areas. Rural children and children in the urban disadvantaged areas did not differ much in any of these areas of development.

Urban advantaged children, without doubt, had better facilities (physically, materially and educationally) than urban disadvantaged, rural and estate children. It was highly possible according to Chiam, that they were also better off psychologically, being more likely to be given better care and attention. Of the three disadvantaged sectors, the estate children might have the least conducive environment for intellectual development.

The parents from the estate sector were educationally and occupationally inferior to parents in the other two sectors , although the amenities in their homes were not worse off than those in the urban disadvantaged or rural areas. Being poorer and having parents with little or no education, estate children had been deprived of physical and psychological environments which stimulate intellectual growth and development. There seemed to be little difference in the educational and occupational level of the parents in the urban disadvantaged and rural sectors.

Since better educated parents possessed a better knowledge of good childcare and their financial status, this had enabled them to give their children a better quality of life. The data showed that father's education had a closer relationship to children's development than that of the mother. In addition, the smaller the family size the better the quality of childcare and this was significantly related to children's physical, language and socio-emotional development.

Several findings of this study showed far-reaching implications for educational and child rearing practices. Distinct developmental trends were observed in all the variables investigated, implying that, during the preschool years, physical, cognitive, language and socio-emotional development were related to chronological age. However, within each age group, there was quite a range in the level of development.

There was also evidence of the presence of critical periods of development which are ages at which optimal development occurs. The greatest differences in cognitive and language development were observed between the ages of four and five years which may be related to the transition from preconceptual to intuitive thinking. In cognitive development, the differences between the advantaged and disadvantaged children were much more obvious in the higher order cognitive skills of reasoning and problem solving. The number of advantaged children who could reason increased steadily as the age of the group went up. But the increase in the number in the disadvantaged sectors was much smaller than the increase in the urban advantaged sector.

Preschool experiences and early intervention could help disadvantaged children to acquire cognitive, language and socio-emotional skills. This was important to narrow the gap between the two groups. If no intervention programmes were implemented to enable disadvantaged children to acquire the higher order basic skills before adfmission to formal school, it was most likely that for most of them, they would fall further and further behind.

Except for physical development, significant gender differences were not recorded in cognitive, language and socio-emotional development. The only exception was in problem solving: the boys in all the age groups were found to be consistently better than the girls. No ethnic differences in any of the areas of development were observed in the urban advantaged sector. Although ethnic differences showed up in a number of variables in the urban disadvantaged and rural-estate sectors, the

differences did not follow any consistent trend.

The study proposed a few childrearing practices to facilitate children's development such as nutrition, immunisation, hygienic and stimulating environment, feelings of self worth and less emotional abuse. There was also an emphasis on parent education and its important role in the development of the young child. Several preschool practices were also recommended to foster children's emotional and social development. In addition, preschools themselves could play a significant role in developing an altruistic and caring generation in a multi racial country like Malaysia.

LESSONS LEARNED

This paper is not a history of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Rather it is a brief look at three large scale sample projects supported by the Foundation in the eighties. The accumulated experiences of these three studies show clearly some of the changes in research focus that have occurred over those years within the Foundation's grant awarding schemes. Whereas in the sixties the emphasis was on the negative aspects of the disadvantaged child as such, it has increasingly shifted so that the later emphasis now tend very much to stress on the positive aspects of any programme or project.

The Mt.Druitt project is characteristic of the compensatory type of project whereas the later projects - the Singapore and Malaysian studies are indicative of the turn of emphasis from compensation for deficiencies to development of the child's innate potential. Another apparent change is the shift from intervention studies to more interactive types of studies. This stresses the social dimension as a powerful determinant in the relationship patterns with the child and his or her family in the community.

One key observation made from the Singapore and Malaysian projects is the movement from the cognitive or intellectual focus of development and interaction to the whole child as the psychological dimension which determines the nature of activities to follow. This is in line with the Foundation's effort to incorporate within its programmes key factors touching upon and influencing the course of the child's life in addition to explicitly cognitive factors. What is implied is a broadening of the concept of education to focus in greater depth on how it can support the total development of the child. As suggested by Philp, a starving child cannot learn and the wider definition of education would include not only language and cognitive development, but also, depending on the setting, health education, social , emotional and cultural development.

All the three projects include quite a high proportion of people living in the urban areas. Industrialisation in the developing world has increased this problem. More and more people are living in cities, are born in them or drift to them. Disadvantaged children are therefore more politically and socially visible and more likely to seek for help from governmental agencies.

Mt.Druitt project on the outskirts of Sydney in Australia is a fringe urban area of low socio-economic status filled with young people, with a high unemployment rate, few community facilities and a disproportionately large number of preschool children. When the project began among the community of some 70,000 people, the average age was about eight years; the mean age of the adult population was only 22 or 23 and the nature of the project had to reflect this demographic set of characteristics.

The Singapore project on the other hand, covers the whole small island city state. It is a highly industrialised and commercialised city with a well developed housing structure specifically designed to cope with the rise in housing shortage but not forgetful of the needs of children. There are no city slums nor any rural areas. The Malaysian study was concerned with children in the city as well as the rural areas on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Not all of the Foundation projects can be fitted into neat and tidy categories just described though there has been a well directed move toward more research work in the city areas.

The Foundation currently supports approximately 130 major projects in some 49 developing and industrialised countries. In the three projects cited in this paper, one key common agenda in each of them is to address early childhood issues of wider concern to the community as a whole. Families and communities are often mobilised for the sake of the well-being of their young children. It was found that a focus on early childhood development can act as an effective entry point for community development and this can offer the potential for wider social change.

Both the Mt. Druitt and the Malaysian Child Development projects are supported by the relevant state governments and the Foundation whereas the Singapore study implies a ten year cooperation with the National Institute of Education. In all of them, the Foundation neither makes one-time financial handouts nor is it responsible for structural funding. The institutional development and organisational strength of the individual recipient country is a pre-condition to the effective implementation, sustainability and dissemmination of whatever child development activities they are responsible for. As noted by the executive director himself, the emphasis is on the support of innovative operational projects or research projects that have relevance for policy development, and have a potential for disseminating their results. Since the processes of implementing a project do require time, a project may last from 3 to 6 years and sometimes even longer.

One important lesson learned from these three projects is with respect to the future development of such large scale projects. This aim is not primarily to move in the direction of more number of such projects in more countries but rather to capitalise on the experience generated by the projects within the country itself. The strategy is to support the development of innovative field-based approaches in the domain of early childhood care and development and simultaneously also to influence policy and practice by drawing on relevant project experiences and sharing

this with a wider audience. There is a strong sustained attempt to analyse the experiences of individual country projects in order to disseminate the distilled knowledge to other practitioners and policy makers within and between countries.

In conclusion, whatever the local features of these three research projects, the center of their attention , though expressed in different forms, has been a set of fundamental partnerships between caregiver and child, between researchers and practitioners and between communities and professionals. The Bernard van Leer Foundation is interested in the integral development of the education of young children. Increasingly the Foundation seeks to establish partnerships with other organisations that address different but related problem areas like health and housing. Such a cooperation where each complements each other's work is potentially very effective, given the fact that problems in each country are of an integrated nature. Country projects are encouraged to establish such partnerships at the national and local level.

It is evident, therefore, that a comprehensive child-care and development programming strategy, seeking real and lasting improvements in survival, growth and development, must be conceived in such a way that it works at all of these levels.It must do more than provide direct attention to the child; it must strengthen and improve the various environments within which the child is developing. A few approaches can be considered such as attending to children in centers; supporting and educating caregivers; promoting community development and strengthening institutional resources and capacities. However, any overall project for enhancing child development must pay attention to the emphasis given to each approach. The emphases must vary considerably depending on the conditions of the particular country in which the project is being developed.

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